

June 10, 1973

Dr. Whitfield J. Bell Jr. III
American Philosophical Society
The Library
105 South Fifth Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

Dear Dr. Bell,

I was pleased to get your letter of June 5th inquiring about suggestions for material in the field of genetics for your collection. In fact, I had been at the point of writing you to ask whether you could give me a quick overview of the manuscript material that you might have that might be helpful for a historical inquiry that I am now engaged in. I have been very much distressed to learn that the correspondence of figures like the late F.J. Ryan and David Bonner has evidently disappeared; my inquiries to George Beadle and Ed Tatum have been almost equally unproductive with respect to letters and similar material for the period between 1943 and 1946 which is the center of my concern. The specific question I am addressing is the nature of the response of contemporary biologists to Avery's publication about DNA. This has been the subject of some controversy that appeared in Nature and in a recent article by Gunther Stent in the Scientific American (December 1972).

I am enclosing a copy of a draft letter that I had submitted to the Scientific American. This probably will not be published in its present form and I thought I would present it to you for your interest as well as your archives to avert possible future accidents. My own recollections about the intellectual reception given to Avery's findings is perfectly clear but it is obviously important to try to bolster this with more contemporary documentary evidence. If you have received manuscript material from my colleague geneticists and biochemists likely to have engaged their thinking with this problem during this interval, I would be grateful for your information about it.

Under separate cover I will heed your request about suggestions of genetics. Fruton's recent book "Molecules and Life" is a remarkable synthesis of the history of biochemistry and cell biology and its own bibliography would be an excellent resource for your purposes. I find it little difficult to single out specific books and papers of unique significance but I could not pass by Jim Watson's "The Molecular Biology of the Gene" and Cavalli-Sforza and Bodmer's "The Genetics of Human Populations" (Freeman, San Francisco) as remarkable works in their respective fields. But I will send you a more extensive list in due course.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr